

Wolfhounds welcome Osaka’s Holy Family orphans

Wolfhounds bolster Sgt. Maj. O’Reilly’s legacy of aloha

Story and Photos by
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HONOLULU — Wolfhound Soldiers, families and distinguished guests welcomed four children from the Holy Family Home Orphanage in Osaka, Japan, at the interisland terminal here at Honolulu International Airport, July 27.

Volunteer Soldiers and their families are hosting Hirohiko and Kentaro Eguchi, ages 12 and 11; Nao Tozaki, age 12; and Izumi Furumoto, age 11, for a fun-filled week in Hawaii. The activities will culminate at a Wolfhounds picnic, today on Schofield Barracks, at the softball field near Stoneman Ave.

The annual “reception” traces its history back to the generous actions of honorary 27th Infantry Regiment Sgt. Maj. Hugh O’Reilly. O’Reilly established a special relationship with the Holy Family Home Orphanage when he and a dozen other Wolfhounds – then stationed in Japan – visited the orphanage as part of a Red Cross outreach mission on Christmas Day, 1949. Gradually, the Wolfhounds came to adopt the orphanage, largely due to O’Reilly.

In 1957, the unit invited two children from the orphanage to visit Soldiers and their families stationed here in Hawaii. The tradition continues today.

While in Hawaii, the children will divide time with 10 Wolfhound families. During their visit, they will experience everything from family dinners to Oahu tourist destinations, including the Polynesian Cultural Center, Waikiki Aquarium, Honolulu Zoo and Hawaiian Waters Adventure Park, among other sites.

“These visits started in 1957 and continue to be a highly anticipated event for every Wolfhound Soldier,” said Lt Col. Richard Wilson, battalion commander, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment. “Our regimental motto ‘Nec Aspera Terrent’ means ‘No Fear,’” he said.

“Its theme is clear and the words can be easily visualized. But it is also a philosophy,” Wilson continued. “Sergeant Major O’Reilly showed no fear when he began this bond between the orphanage and the Wolfhounds in a time when our nations were at war.”

“‘No fear’ also means doing what is right and that is what those initial Wolfhounds did back in Japan some 56 years ago. O’Reilly set out to fix a problem, and his efforts — coupled with his genuine compassion and determination — have led us to this point where this mutual bond [between Soldiers and orphans] will endure well past our lifetime,” Wilson emphasized.

Staff Sgt. Robert Klein, squad leader, Charlie Co., 1-27th; his wife Amy; and their two daughters Catherine and Emma, are one of the 10 volunteer families.

“We are hosting the two little girls,” said Mrs. Klein. “We just thought since we have two girls that [Nao and Izumi] might relate better to them,” she said.

“We volunteered for a few reasons,” explained Staff Sgt. Klein. “It’s important for our girls to experience kids from another culture. But it is also important that we contribute to the legacy that Sergeant Major O’Reilly started,” he said.

“On a personal level, I’m adopted myself,” said Klein. “So, for me, it’s important to give love and care back to these children, even if just for three days. I know that even three days can have a huge impact on someone’s life,” he added.

The generosity of Wolfhound families like the Kleins and the Holy Family Home orphanage was not lost on the reception’s featured speaker, Hawaii Lt. Gov. Duke Aiona.

“The Wolfhounds exemplify what military service is all about,” said Aiona. “Service is about more than service to the country; it is also about service to humanity, which is something that the world doesn’t see very often,” Aiona said.

“When I read the history of your program [with the orphanage], the thing that came to mind is the word ‘Aloha,’” he explained. “This project defines the aloha spirit. It is what you have inside of you ...

love, compassion, peace and giving.

“I cannot imagine what these children must be feeling now, but when the last day of the beautiful trip comes to an end, I am sure each will now understand what this spirit of aloha is all about,” the lieutenant governor said.

Right — Hawaii Lt. Governor Duke Aiona welcomes visitors with customary lei.

Far Right — Lt. Col. Drew Merewich, battalion commander, 2-27th (left), and Lt. Col. Richard Wilson, battalion commander, 1-27th (right), assist in cake cutting.

